

**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Health Sub-Committee  
Tuesday, February 28th**

**In Support of H.B. No. 6659: An Act Concerning the State Budget for The Biennium  
Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefor**

Good evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Exum, and Paris, and Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide general comment on H.B. No. 6659: An Act Concerning the State Budget for The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

My name is Jim Pettinelli, I am the executive director of Liberty Community Services in New Haven and we provide housing and homeless services across Greater New Haven. Our organization is a member of the Reaching Home Campaign, the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance, and the Greater New Haven Alliance to End Homelessness. I've been working in the field of housing and behavioral health now for many years.

I stand proudly with my community partners in the state, to advocate fiercely for this budget measure. When our community members have access to needed housing and homeless services, their economic and health outcomes improve. Research has shown - [Housing is Healthcare](https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Housing-is-Health-Care.pdf). (<https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Housing-is-Health-Care.pdf>)

Our system for too many years has been seriously underfunded and under-resourced. Our system requires focused “rescue” funds for our essential front-line staff and the necessary service capacity to best meet the needs of those we serve.

- **Connecticut’s homeless response system is overburdened, historically underfunded,** and confronting a workforce shortage that threatens the statewide safety net we provide.
- **The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic remain acute for the homeless response system.** Our data shows that homelessness has grown significantly since the beginning of the pandemic, with a 39% increase in homelessness since 2020, and a 56% increase in calls to 2-1-1 in 2022 alone. Since 2019, our system has witnessed a 30% increase in unsheltered households and 82% increase in CAN appointments for those at imminent risk of homelessness.
- **As inflation has risen rapidly, so have the operations costs for our system.** Like any public service, homeless services providers must pay the costs of health insurance, rent, utilities, and other goods and services, often at the expense of adequate wages. Unlike most public services, homeless service providers are barely funded by the state.
- **Connecticut’s homeless response system is confronting a workforce shortage that threatens the statewide safety net we provide.** Staff who have dedicated their careers to helping people experiencing homelessness are finding themselves in need of the same services they provide and being pushed into homelessness themselves. We need the legislature to help our providers ensure adequate wages, with a focus on transforming jobs in the sector into careers of choice.

**We need this Committee’s help to Rescue the Homeless Response System.** Of the total \$50,000,000 to Rescue the Homeless Response System, we are asking this committee to commit to a **\$7,713,799 one-time increase in DMHAS Housing/Supports Services line** to

address chronic underfunding of homeless response nonprofits and to ensure adequate wages for front-line homeless response workers.

**There remains no dedicated annual funding for the parts of our system that our communities rely on year after year. Therefore, we also request your support for the following annual amounts:**

- **\$5.95 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for Coordinated Access Network infrastructure, to ensure that the indispensable emergency services we provide are available to all.
- **\$5 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for the annual Cold Weather Emergency Response Program.
- **\$2 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for a Flexible Funding Subsidy Pool to subsidize housing and provide flexible assistance, which have been shown to lower costs to the health care system and lead to improved individual health outcomes.

Over these last many years, COVID-19 aimed a laser focused spotlight on our housing and homeless services system – a shining light on the impactful work accomplished and the amazing talent and resilience of our staff. Over the years our system has seen remarkable collaboration and innovation – yet the necessary funding has been absent! It is imperative to get focused “rescue” funds in place. Now is the time to keep the amazing work moving forward – community providers remain on the front-lines led by our competent talented essential staff – with these much needed resources we can continue working to support the critical needs of our community members – supporting health, safety, and linkage to services. Our amazing staff, these programs never came off-line. We never stopped in-person engagement and support – there is no such thing as “tele-housing.”

It is with your support that we can rescue the homeless response system. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Pettinelli', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jim Pettinelli, executive director  
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